(c) The Central Government provides Special Central Assistance to Tribal sub-Plan, as an additive to the State Plan, to bring about a more rapid economic development of tribals in the States. Under Art. 275 (1) of the Constitution, the Central Government provides 100 per cent grants through a Central Sector Scheme covering all Tribal Sub-Plans and 4 tribal majority States of the country. At present, this Scheme releases funds to State Governments against specific infrastructure development and welfare projects. In addition, there are a number of Central and Centrally Sponsored Schemes covering development of education infrastructure and improving access of tribal population to educational institutions, vocational training, development of marketing infrastructure, harnessing and processing of minor forest produce, and supporting family and area based development of tribal regions. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Swaranjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana, targeted public distribution and other such Centrally Sponsored Schemes also benefit the Scheduled Tribes population and improve their income levels.

AIR Cargo clearance for China

*6. SHRI O.T. LEPCHA:
SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA:

Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether China has refused Government's offer of Delhi as a port of call to Chinese Cargo Carrier "Great Wall Airlines" and has held up clearances for Air India to fly to Guangzhou as was agreed to earlier, during the Chinese President's visit to India last November;

(b) whether plans of Jet Airways to fly to Chicago *via* Shanghai too are blocked up; and

(c) if so, what was China's demand in return for concessions sought for Air India cargo clearance and Government's response thereto, and what is the dispute still outstanding?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) to (c) The Government had offered Delhi as a point of call to the Great Wall Airlines of China for all cargo operations. The Chinese side has not refused this offer, but, asked for Mumbai and Chennai also which has been agreed to by the Government provided all the procedural formalities are completed.

As per the information received from National Aviation Company of India Ltd., currently no clearance is pending with the Chinese authorities so far as operations by the national carrier is concerned.

As regards the request of Jet Airways to operate to San Francisco *via* Shanghai, the Chinese authorities have sought certain clarifications in respect of the route schedule agreed to between the two countries on 11th April, 2005. The same has been clarified to the Chinese side through our Embassy and the response of the Chinese side is awaited.

Irregularities in Sahitya Akademi

*7. SHRIMATI SYEDA ANWARA TAIMUR:
SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA:

Will the Minister of CULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether eminent authors have expressed grave concern about the alleged falling standards and growing irregularities in the Sahitya Akademi;

(b) if so, whether the provisions that were framed to give representation to the best and proven talents of all Indian languages are being distorted and vested interests are alleged to be making changes with ulterior motives; and

(c) if so, whether Government would institute an enquiry in their administrative, financial and professional working?

THE MINISTER OF CULTURE (SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI): (a) to (c) Concerns had been expressed by some eminent writers and General Council members largely in the context of amendments made by the General Council of the Sahitya Akademi, in its meeting held on 7.10.2007, to certain provisions of the Akademi's Constitution.

Objections regarding these amendments have been addressed by the General Council in its subsequent meeting held on 26.12.2007. The reconstitution of General Council of Sahitya Akademi has since been completed according to the provisions contained in the Constitution of the Sahitya Akademi. A new President of the Akademi has also been elected by the newly-constituted General Council in its meeting held on 20.02.2008.

Increase in airfare in gulf sector

*8. PROF. P.J. KURIEN: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has received complaints alleging that Air India is hiking the airfare in the Gulf route during the peak seasons;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government proposes to stop this unjustified exploitation;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. Suggestions have been received from some Hon'ble MPs for reducing the fares to/from Gulf region to stations in Kerala/Karnataka.

(c) to (e) Airlines generally maintain very competitive fares on gulf sector. While the fares are maintained at normal level during vacation/festival time, the fares the reduced during the non-peak periods when the demand is low. Air India has also launched a low cost subsidiary called Air India Express which operates on the Gulf route and offers 20-25% lower airfares than those charged by the legacy carriers with the discount in fare going up to even 50% during lean season.

Decline in irrigation by canals

†*9. SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ: Will the Minister of WATER RESOURCES be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that there has been continuous decline in irrigation by canals during the last ten years;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) the details of efforts being made to enhance irrigation sector?

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi